

**A Fresh Start for Bird Rock
Council President Scott Peters, First District
For the La Jolla Village News**

La Jollans are fiercely protective of their community, and rightly so. Changes to the look and feel of our neighborhood should not be made lightly, which is why any proposed amendment to the Bird Rock Planned District Ordinance (“PDO”) deserves close scrutiny.

The original proposal made by two members of the La Jolla community drew fierce opposition in Bird Rock and elsewhere in La Jolla. While I applaud the La Jolla planning groups for their hard work, the debate had become too personal and too focused on the question of how many stories would be allowed within the 30-foot height limit.

The question of how Bird Rocks looks and feels in the future should be broader than that. We should be asking what we *do* want, as opposed to focusing on what we don’t want. The community itself should drive the process and define what kinds of changes are allowed.

That’s why I’ve asked the LJCPA to set aside the new proposals for amendments to the PDO. In order to help move the conversation forward in a positive direction, I’ve hired respected architect and planner Michael Stepner and his partner Michael Blackson to lead community workshops to review and possibly revise land use regulations. Neither Mr. Stepner nor Mr. Blackson has a financial interest in this process or its outcome.

Much like the Bird Rock traffic calming and maintenance assessment district plans, community members, not the city or business community, will drive the discussion. At a series of community meetings, residents will debate design and architectural standards, parking, protections for surrounding homeowners and other pertinent issues now, before any development happens.

Mr. Stepner’s background and expertise are uniquely suited to this project. He worked as a planner in the City of San Diego for many years, serving as the city’s first and only City Architect. He’s currently the Dean of the New School of Architecture and Design, in addition to his work with HB3 Urban Design. The firm has assembled award-winning plans for the city and county, which were recognized for their ability to achieve community consensus. Mr. Stepner has personally been awarded numerous local, state, national and international planning and architectural awards. In 1997, the San Diego chapter of the American Institute of Architects changed the name of its Community Design Award to the Michael J. Stepner award. I’m confident that his extensive knowledge of San Diego and his experience with integrating urban design techniques will benefit our community.

Mr. Stepner estimates that this process will take three to six months. Once we have a better sense of what sensitive, thoughtful, inclusive development looks like, we can turn

those ideas into a roadmap for the future. If this process is successful, it could serve as a template for other areas of San Diego.

I invite all Bird Rock residents to participate in one or more of these important meetings. By setting aside our differences and working together to define what we want our community to look like, we can make Bird Rock an even better place.